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Progress report on the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present progress report has been prepared in response to a request of the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-seventh session. It provides information on action taken by United Nations bodies and agencies since the last progress report of 20 May 1997. It also sets out the linkages between the System-wide Special Initiative, the United Nations development assistance frameworks and the country strategy notes and outlines the way forward for the Special Initiative, which reflects the recommendations formulated at a high-level retreat organized by the secretariat of the Special Initiative. These recommendations were presented to the ACC Steering Committee for endorsement.

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I. Introduction

1. Following its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed revision to the System-wide Plan of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (E/AC.51/1997/6) and of the progress report on the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa (E/AC.51/1997/7), the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Steering Committee for the Special Initiative to make the necessary arrangements for the elaboration of comprehensive programmes on regional cooperation and integration and economic diversification, as these two areas are critical priority areas for the development of Africa.[1]

2. It has emerged from the conclusions adopted at the high-level retreat on the Special Initiative held on 9 February 1998, and as stated in paragraph 43 below, that the Special Initiative should concentrate maximum efforts in the near term on those areas where results have been achieved, i.e., education, health, governance and information technology for development. The high-level retreat also recommended including population as a priority area and mainstreaming gender more assertively. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs advised the co-chairs of the ACC Steering Committee for the Special Initiative to make necessary arrangements for the elaboration of programmes for the two additional priority areas of regional cooperation and integration and economic diversification and was informed by the co-chairs that consultations were under way in this respect.

3. The Committee for Programme and Coordination also recommended that, in order to assist in establishing a functional linkage between the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and the Special Initiative, the latter should be referred to in future as the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.[2]

4. The Committee further requested that a progress report on the renamed Special Initiative be submitted for its consideration at its thirty-eighth session, which should include, *inter alia*, measures taken in response to the recommendations in paragraphs 356 and 357 of the report of the Committee on its thirty-seventh session.[3] The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

II. Action taken to implement the Special Initiative since its last consideration by the Committee

A. Overall progress

5. Since the submission of the last progress report, coordination has improved as United Nations agencies and others have set joint priorities in a number of areas, such as coordinated work on education, health, governance and informatics. Although it is still early for the Special Initiative to live up to all its potential, laudable efforts are being made by a number of United Nations bodies and agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to integrate the priorities of the Special Initiative into their activities. Also, some African countries, such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Senegal and Togo have fully embraced the Special Initiative. Notwithstanding these developments, many challenges remain to be met.

6. For some time, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the secretariat of the Special Initiative have been collaborating in developing joint activities in the priority sectors of the New Agenda and the Special Initiative. The present report is a joint undertaking of these two entities.

7. During the ministerial session of the Security Council on Africa, held in September 1997, several donor countries commended the United Nations for designing the framework of the Special Initiative. In his April 1998 report to the Security Council (A/52/871-S/1998/318), the Secretary-General emphasized the need to harmonize current international and bilateral initiatives, including the New Agenda and the Special Initiative, in order to ensure that the United Nations and its funds and programmes were working effectively together, as well as the African Governments and society, donors and non-governmental organizations.

B. Governance

8. The ECA/UNDP leadership in governance programme is geared towards improving coordination arrangements and reinforcing resource mobilization strategies for countries that

are participating in the annual African Governance Forum. The first such Forum, held at Addis Ababa in July 1997, provided an opportunity for representatives of African Governments, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and the donor community to engage in a dialogue on ongoing constitutional, judicial and administrative reforms in African countries. Fourteen African countries participated and presented national governance programme frameworks. It was agreed to accelerate the reform process with emphasis on leadership building, transparency and accountability, civil society empowerment, institutional capacity-building, the rule of law, constitutional guarantees and media freedom. The Forum adopted a plan of action to assess progress of reform in the various countries and decided to hold similar forums on an annual basis. Such forums should provide an opportunity to discuss best practices in various areas of good governance; they should also report on and discuss the status of ongoing governance programmes and identify potential programmes for donor support. They should, furthermore, register and monitor international and national resources to promote good governance in Africa and interact with other development partners to ensure coordination and collaboration around governance programmes in Africa. The conclusions of the Forum were made available to the UNDP International Conference on Governance for Sustainable Growth and Equity, which took place in New York in July 1997. The theme of the next Forum, to be held in Ghana in June 1998, will be accountability and transparency. Sixteen African countries are expected to attend. The Governments of Switzerland and Norway have already pledged their support for the organization of the Forum. The European Union and the Government of the Netherlands are considering providing additional funding.

9. UNESCO and ECA co-hosted a Regional Consultation Meeting on Communication for Peace-building in Africa at Addis Ababa in June 1997. The meeting discussed a draft project document, prepared by UNESCO, on the use of communications media to promote peace, tolerance, democracy, good governance and respect for human rights. The immediate objectives of the proposed project are to prepare a regional plan of action for building peace in Africa through communication and to prepare national action plans for 12 countries in the region. It was suggested that the communications strategy adopt the use of radio in conjunction with other media to create greater awareness about the havoc caused by conflict and the necessity of peace for any meaningful development. UNESCO suggested five categories of criteria for selecting countries to participate in the pilot projects: countries in pre-conflict, conflict or post-conflict situations; the relative freedom and independence of the media; the existence of ongoing or planned projects in the area of peace-building; political will and a request from national authorities; and the urgency of the need for action. UNESCO will have to secure explicit support for the Special Initiative from African Governments through the Organization of African Unity. The meeting also recommended that the United Nations system establish subregional press centres to facilitate the delivery of information on activities related to the Special Initiative.

10. In accordance with the goals set out in the Special Initiative, ECA, with the support of key partners and in collaboration with stakeholders, has established the African Centre for Civil Society. It was officially launched on 24 October 1997. Its mission is to enhance cooperation among African Governments and civil society by encouraging Governments to institute an enabling environment for the growth of non-governmental organizations and organizations of civil society to enhance their capacity for strengthening democracy and for preventing conflict.

11. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and ECA organized in March 1998 at Addis Ababa, in collaboration with the Government of Japan and the Commonwealth Secretariat, a conference on Governance in Africa: Consolidating the Institutional Foundations. The Conference, which was a contribution to the implementation of the Governance Programme of the Special Initiative, made the following main recommendations:

(a) Concerted efforts should be made to educate the public about respect for constitutions and constitutionalism. Financial resources will be needed for nationwide campaigns of education for democracy, including the culture of peace, tolerance and respect for diversity, as well as to translate constitutions into indigenous languages;

(b) Institution building should be essential to the consolidation of good governance. The building of parliament and its committees as effective organs of legislative oversight, as well as independent commissions, such as electoral commissions and offices of the auditor general or the ombudsman, also require the kind of financial resources that most African States cannot mobilize on their own. The contribution of the international community is indispensable in this respect;

(c) Training programmes for the media with emphasis on fairness, responsibility and objectivity should be organized in order to help enhance their educational role and their contribution to democratic values;

(d) Capacity-building for electoral systems to enhance their ability to organize free, fair and transparent elections, is essential for consolidating the institutional foundations of good governance in Africa.

C. Information technology for development

Harnessing information technology for development

12. Harnessing information technology for development counts among those areas that have registered progress. The components of the cluster include awareness-raising for policy reform for African participation in the information age; involvement of African leaders and stakeholders in the information revolution; increased Internet connectivity; promoting development and dissemination of sector applications; and capacity-building in computer networking and informatics applications. The document that was endorsed as the output of a series of conferences was entitled "Africa Information Society Initiative: An Action Framework for Building Africa's Information and Communication Infrastructure". It calls for the elaboration and implementation of national information and communication infrastructure plans and the development of institutional frameworks, as well as human and technological resources, in all African countries in order to stimulate the economic and social growth of African societies.

13. The group working on the African Information Society Initiative, Partners in Information and Communication Technology for Africa, has already set up a web site, an electronic discussion group and a distributed entry database of projects and programmes. At a meeting held at Addis Ababa in October 1997, all the members of the group accepted the African Information Society Initiative as the framework around which they would undertake their activities. They reaffirmed their commitment to joint activities as a way to leverage resources and avoid duplication of efforts. The plans for 1998 include awareness- raising through workshops and dissemination of the framework of action for the African Information Society Initiative, training and capacity-building through country education systems and the development of regional training institutions.

14. In August 1997, the Société des télécommunications du Mali organized a training course on telematics applications for development at Bamako, with the support of the Agence francophone pour l'enseignement supérieur et la recherche, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and UNESCO. UNESCO was planning subregional courses for central, southern and west Africa on network development for 1997 and early 1998, in collaboration with partners in the programme for harnessing information technology for development, and has been preparing distance education modules in cooperation with French and Tunisian institutions. Furthermore, UNESCO was developing an overall training plan in collaboration with ITU and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). UNESCO, together with ITU and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) initiated pilot projects on a multipurpose community telecentre in Mali and Uganda, and the projects in Benin, Mozambique and Tanzania were expected to be launched in 1998.

Communication and Outreach Strategy

15. The Communication and Outreach Strategy: Advocacy for Africa has been designed by ECA in consultation with other United Nations agencies to facilitate the forging of partnerships among agencies within the United Nations system and with Africa's development partners for systematic outreach and advocacy for the continent. One of the immediate objectives of the project is to work with Africa's development partners to ensure the timely availability and delivery of high quality information on economic and social development issues in Africa and to disseminate best practices. Another objective is to develop and implement effective advocacy for Africa through the Special Initiative and to redress the image of Africa in the international community. Other objectives are to build the capacity of African communicators to report and participate in the discourse on Africa's future through the provision of information technology skills training and to broaden the range and impact of the communication services of ECA through the use of electronic, audio-visual and other relevant media. The following are the four broad components of the project: advocacy for Africa's development; capacity-building for effective information flows; networking and awareness-raising; and database development.

16. On 14 and 15 October 1997, the secretariat of the Special Initiative convened a Consultation Meeting on Redressing the Image of Africa Problem, a key focus of the Strategy. The meeting analysed the problem of the image of Africa and recommended that ECA take a lead in strengthening the African media by holding regular workshops for African journalists on the development challenges facing Africa. The meeting also endorsed the telematics media project started by ECA under the harnessing information technology for development component of the Special Initiative.

D. Education

17. The World Bank's overall commitment to the Special Initiative and the collaborative leadership with UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF of cluster coordination in education has resulted in greater programme coordination and the promise of additional resources. With the primary objective of ensuring access to basic education for all African children by the year 2010, the Special Initiative has demonstrated good progress in the education sector. Education sector investment programmes are under way or in preparation in Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique and Senegal. Work plans for a total of 15 countries with low enrollment rates at the primary education level are in the final stages of preparation. This will pave the way for tangible progress towards improvement of the low enrollment rates in those countries.

18. UNESCO prepared, through UNDP funding, an education sector analysis in Rwanda and submitted the draft report to the Government during the second half of 1997, with the objective of identifying the priority areas for the reconstruction and development of the country's education system. The Government of Zimbabwe, supported by the UNDP Resident Coordinator, solicited UNESCO assistance to organize, before the end of 1997, a high-level technical meeting on its education sector strategy with a view to preparing the education plan and the development of basic education.

19. A model of national leadership and inter-agency cooperation is the Ethiopian experience. Under the coordination of the Government and with the support of the World Bank, UNESCO and other specialized agencies, the implementation of the Ethiopian education sector development programme is progressing steadily.

20. In July 1997, within the context of the Special Initiative, the Government of Mozambique organized a high-level consultative meeting, hosted by UNESCO, on its education sector strategy. The Resident Coordinator and the whole United Nations country team, as well as representatives of major bilateral donors involved in the education sector, participated. The objective of the meeting was to help build consensus and donor support around the education sector strategy being formulated by the Government of Mozambique. The meeting recommended that the main partners agree on criteria and mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and follow-up, which could include joint annual reviews and joint reporting procedures. Furthermore, it was recommended that they agree on efficient management and administration of funds and on a programme approach.

E. Health

21. There is widespread agreement on the content of the system-wide health reform needed in Africa, with emphasis on basic health services and on system-wide health reforms at the country level. Another focus is directed at the subregional level to diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which have cross-border implications. WHO made significant contributions to this sector by developing strategies for health sector reform through inter-agency and technical consultations, and through coordination of activities with other United Nations agencies. Several initiatives have been developed by WHO in cooperation with the World Bank to support the national and collective health agenda for African Governments and their multilateral institutions in close collaboration with partners within and outside the United Nations system. As the impact of weak preventive health care is felt most severely by the children of Africa, UNICEF is another of the cooperating agencies of the Special Initiative.

22. According to a 1997 World Bank progress report, some $3.5 billion is being mobilized to support health sector development in 10 African countries, for which data are available. More than half of this total will come from the countries themselves, with the donor community mobilizing the remaining $1.5 billion, of which about $500 million will be provided by the World Bank. These 10 countries are among 15 considered as being positioned to execute the type of reform programmes outlined in the Special Initiative. The 15 – Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe – all have either ongoing World Bank-sponsored sector investment programmes or are in the process of preparing one.

F. Population and gender

23. UNFPA collaborates with other United Nations agencies to ensure mainstreaming of reproductive health, population and gender concerns in all programme areas under the Special Initiative through the development of common situation analyses or the establishment of baseline data. This collaboration is being done within the framework of country strategy notes and common country assessments. It is concentrating, in particular, on specific country needs in Cape Verde, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe. It was actively involved in the launching of the Special Initiative in Malawi and conducted awareness-raising seminars in the Niger and Sao Tome and Principe to assist in integrating population and gender issues into the country reform strategies. UNFPA has

also played a key advocacy role for incorporating reproductive health care as part of a minimum package of health services in health sector reforms. In particular, the agency was active in that area in Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Benin and Ghana.

24. On another level, UNFPA called attention to the need for gender-disaggregated data analyses and gender-focused training as steps essential to realizing gender-related goals. The Ethiopia United Nations country team retreat recommended that gender focal points within each United Nations entity incorporate the implementation of the Special Initiative in their agendas. Plans exist between the secretariat of the Special Initiative, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa and the ECA Africa Women's Centre to lay the groundwork for developing specific guidelines for gender mainstreaming within the Special Initiative.

G. Poverty reduction

25. In April 1996, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Poverty Reduction in Africa through the Promotion of the Informal Sector and Employment Generating Opportunities was established. The lead agencies in that Task Force are the International Labour Organization (ILO) and ECA, supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, UNDP, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNESCO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. The Task Force was expected to develop concrete proposals for consideration by the ACC Steering Committee for the Special Initiative. The programme of action that has been drawn up foresees six subprogrammes, namely: creating an enabling environment for informal sector development; access to financial services; education and training; industrial and manufacturing activities; rural non-farm activities; and infrastructure. Serious attempts are being made to maintain a gender focus in all the subprogrammes, and, for sustainability, the participation of the private sector is stressed alongside the public sector, non-governmental organizations and donors.

26. The programme of action was presented to the ACC Steering Committee in March 1998. Once endorsed by the Steering Committee, it would be transmitted through the United Nations resident coordinator system to be taken into account in the implementation of programmes at the national level. It should also be transmitted to participating United Nations agencies for coordinated implementation at subregional, regional and global levels.

27. Within the framework of the programme of action to support the development of the informal sector in Africa, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries, in its capacity as a member of the Inter-Agency Task Force, is trying to mobilize resources to undertake project identification missions in selected African countries. The Office programmed for 1998 a regional workshop on best practices in providing an enabling administrative and legal environment for the development of the informal sector in Africa. This expert-level workshop is expected to provide a forum for learning from the experiences of African countries that have successfully embarked on providing an enabling environment for the promotion of the informal sector. Some of the best practices will be disseminated at the national level through UNDP offices. The office of the Special Coordinator recently published a report, for dissemination to Member States, on the special programme of support for the development of the informal sector.

28. The Office of the Special Coordinator has prepared a publication on poverty eradication in Africa. The publication links 14 case studies to the broader concept of poverty eradication in Africa. It shows what activities the Governments and people of Africa are planning and undertaking to alleviate poverty, and also assesses their sustainability.

H. Other priority areas

Advancing financial intermediation in Africa

29. A well developed financial sector is critical in stimulating private domestic savings and investment in Africa to achieve sustained economic growth and development. Despite the progress made, the financial sector in most African countries remains weak in terms of mobilizing private savings. In view of the continuing decline in official development assistance flows to Africa and the low level of foreign direct and portfolio investment in Africa, putting in place appropriate policy and institutional reform could help create the conditions for higher levels of financial resources.

30. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries organized in April 1998, in collaboration with the Government of the Mauritius and the Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries of UNDP, a high-level Asia-Africa workshop on

advancing financial intermediation in Africa. The interregional workshop considered, among other things, the implementation of the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Towards advancing financial intermediation in Africa" (A/50/490). Another related objective was the sharing of experiences of African and Asian countries in advancing financial intermediation, especially in the areas of deposit mobilization, sound banking management and improving the intermediation role of the informal financial sector.

31. The outcome of the workshop was to prepare and adopt an agenda of action for improving financial intermediation in Africa. It mapped out follow-up action at the subregional level for advancing financial intermediation in Africa.

I. Country-level implementation

32. Progress at the country level is widely viewed as the primary measure of determining the added value of the Special Initiative. United Nations country team retreats led by resident coordinators in Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique and Togo have been helpful in defining the best ways to harmonize programming instruments and reporting requirements. While the common objective of these retreats was to take stock of the status of Special Initiative implementation, discuss and resolve a number of issues and reach agreement and/or expand understanding on how to move forward, each was tailored to the country-specific needs as agreed by the United Nations country team.

33. The country-specific objectives included support for capacity-building in implementation of sector investment programmes in Ethiopia; building broad-based coalitions among the Government, donors, the United Nations system and other partners in support of the Special Initiative and strengthening the country strategy note process in Ghana; and placing emphasis on the search for a strategy to deepen dialogue with the Government on the finalization of the common country assessment in Mozambique. In Togo, the main objective was to agree on the formulation and implementation of a joint United Nations system programme of support to the National Programme for Poverty Eradication. The participation of Governments (in Ethiopia and Ghana), donors (in Ghana and Mozambique) and non-governmental organizations (in Ghana) has set the pattern for other planned retreats. Effective linking of the Special Initiative to existing or planned programming instruments was a constant preoccupation of participants, for example, with the country strategy notes (approved for Ghana, Mozambique and Togo), the common country assessments and country cooperation frameworks (in draft for Ghana, Ethiopia and Mozambique) and the United Nations development assistance framework pilot exercise. Although not specifically linked to the Special Initiative, greater United Nations country team collaboration is also evident in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Zimbabwe, in most instances aimed at achieving the goals of the Special Initiative.

34. Support by bilateral donors for primary education in Senegal and Mozambique resulted directly from consultations and agreements in the context of the Special Initiative. In Senegal, with the active collaboration of UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank, France is leading the process of programmed support for Government efforts to overcome policy impediments. The issue of accommodating the cost of teacher's salaries within a macroeconomic framework, for example, is being addressed, and this will eventually contribute to greater resource flows through sector investment programmes. Similarly, resource mobilization efforts in Mozambique led to a consultation on education hosted by UNESCO in Paris. Support by bilateral donors was critical in assisting Government efforts to place primary education within a macroeconomic framework. These two models are now being used by Zimbabwe.

III. Linkages between the Special Initiative, the United Nations development assistance frameworks and the country strategy notes

A. The Special Initiative and United Nations development assistance frameworks

35. The Special Initiative and the United Nations development assistance framework work towards fulfilling a common objective: to increase the efficiency and impact of United Nations system assistance to the development effort of the host countries.

36. At the country level, the Special Initiative actively promotes, through resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, among other things, implementation of measures intended to strengthen United Nations system coordination, collaborative approaches and harmonization of operational activities, as well as to promote joint activities, all in support of the implementation of national priority areas.

37. The United Nations development assistance framework process helps to achieve these goals by serving as a common framework for all development funds, programmes and

agencies. The process of its preparation, by involving the United Nations country team at the initial stage through the common country assessment being done jointly by all funds and programmes conducting development activities in the country under the leadership of the resident coordinators, helps strengthen coordination, harmonization, collaboration and joint activities (goals of the Special Initiative). By facilitating the achievement of the goals of the Special Initiative, the United Nations development assistance framework acts, indeed, as a vehicle for its implementation.

38. Of the 18 countries where the preparation of United Nations development assistance frameworks has been launched on a pilot basis, 10 are African (Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe). The process of United Nations development assistance framework preparation will enhance operationalization of the Special Initiative in those 10 countries. The United Nations development assistance framework process has benefited from early implementation of the Special Initiative in a few countries. For example, in Mozambique, the United Nations country team viewed the Special Initiative after its launching, as a useful framework for bringing greater coherence to United Nations activities in the country, and embarked on an early preparation of a common country assessment. This early process of common country assessment preparation facilitated and accelerated the United Nations development assistance framework process under the pilot phase. In Ghana, early preparation of a common country assessment in response to the Special Initiative has also facilitated the United Nations development assistance framework process.

B. The Special Initiative and country strategy notes

39. In the context of the implementation of the Special Initiative, country strategy notes, where they exist, remain the framework that sets out the Government's objectives, priorities and areas of United Nations system assistance.

40. In those countries where progress has been noted in the operationalization of the Special Initiative, country strategy notes have been the basic framework of reference for national objectives, priorities and areas where United Nations system assistance is needed.

41. In Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Togo and Senegal, Special Initiative implementation activities take into account the appropriate country strategy notes prepared under the leadership of the Government. Where priorities set out in the country strategy notes are not congruent with those of the Special Initiative, or where the country strategy notes are not up to date, the United Nations country teams have planned to assist the Governments in updating them.

IV. The way forward

42. On 9 February 1998, the secretariat of the Special Initiative organized a high-level retreat, co-chaired by the UNDP Administrator and the ECA Executive Secretary. The main objective of the retreat was to assess progress and put forward recommendations for the spring session of ACC and the seventh meeting of the ACC Steering Committee. While acknowledging progress as set out in the preceding sections, it was recognized at the retreat that the main challenges for the Special Initiative revolved around identifying in a convincing manner its added value, resource additionality in light of declining official development assistance and marginal investment flows for Africa; mainstreaming within the United Nations system; and building sustainable partnerships for Africa utilizing the Special Initiative as a vehicle. The retreat reached agreement on conclusions and recommendations, including those set out below.

43. Maximum efforts should be concentrated in the near term on those areas where results have been achieved under the Special Initiative, moving forward as rapidly as possible in areas of strength where a platform for further success has been built. Concentration on the priority areas of education, health, governance, harnessing information technology for development, gender and population was suggested. The continuing importance of sectors such as food security, water, and trade and investment was fully appreciated, and participants were firm in their suggestion that demonstrable progress in collaboration within the United Nations system on those sectors should be monitored and assistance provided as required, within the framework of the Special Initiative.

44. Political mobilization should aim at greater African advocacy, including by Heads of State, ministers and representatives of civil society. Mobilization of the United Nations system under the leadership of the Secretary-General in support of the Special Initiative framework, including linking it to the United Nations development assistance framework process, should be strengthened. Monitoring its progress at the ACC level will send clear signals to galvanize United Nations country teams. Similarly, joint action at the level of regional directors and vice-presidents in targeting regional and subregional groupings will enhance political mobilization.

45. The strategy for gender mainstreaming must be a cross-cutting priority if the Special Initiative is to have a lasting positive impact. There is a need to develop common guidelines to enable agencies to carry out their gender mainstreaming work more effectively. The upcoming events for the fortieth anniversary of ECA, for which economic empowerment of women will be the main theme, will offer an opportune occasion to launch the gender dimension of the Special Initiative.

46. The retreat suggested that population be a component on its own in order to promote more coordinated action in this priority area, which is central to African development in many ways. UNFPA was requested to develop an action plan for discussion at the seventh meeting of the ACC Steering Committee.

47. The retreat recognized the possibility of using the Special Initiative as a mechanism to promote communication for African development and to facilitate constituency-building and the broadening of the stakeholders' involvement, as well as to foster dialogue around economic issues. A mechanism for more systematic and regular dissemination of information needs to be worked out in support of political mobilization and for sharing best practices. All participating agencies, especially those with coordination responsibilities, should commit themselves to contributing to the regular information flow if the Special Initiative is to succeed.

48. Since the suggested concentration of priority areas of the Special Initiative is meant to promote ambitious partnerships, targeting goals that no one organization could achieve alone, efforts to build synergy with other initiatives having similar elements (e.g., the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development; the Swedish Partnership; the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee Shaping the 21st Century, United States initiative) should be intensified.

49. There was a clear consensus that additional resources were needed for Africa. With the improvement of absorptive capacity for the main sectors of the Special Initiative, resource flows from both bilateral and multilateral sources should improve. The substantial decrease of official development assistance resources and the search for solutions to reverse that trend ought to be central to the Special Initiative, consistent with its main objective of bringing Africa to the centre of the international community's development agenda.

50. The secretariat of the Special Initiative was requested to play a more proactive role. Given its limited resources, the secretariat should work more closely with focal points of agencies and organizations. The secretariat and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries should strengthen their collaboration in ensuring that progress being made in the implementation of Special Initiative priority areas is demonstrated to contribute to the achievement of the principles of UN-NADAF.

V. Measures taken in response to the recommendations made by the Committee at its thirty-seventh session[4]

51. In response to the recommendation that the global political advocacy and policy setting of the Special Initiative remain under the leadership of the Secretary-General, it should be underscored that the Secretary-General is giving particular attention to African development. Since his assumption of office, he has committed himself to the achievements of the objectives of the UN-NADAF and pledged to use the Special Initiative to mobilize and harmonize the assistance of the United Nations system to implement the New Agenda. He also stressed before the thirty-eighth session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity and the General Assembly (Fifth Committee) that Africa would be one of the main beneficiaries of his reform package.

52. The Secretary-General recently reconstituted the Panel of High-level Personalities on African Development to make it more assertive, and even proactive. In September 1997, the Security Council held a ministerial session on Africa. This gave the Secretary-General another opportunity to address forcefully the challenges facing the continent. The ensuing presidential statement (S/1997/PRST/46) requested him to submit to the Council in February 1998 a report on Africa, in the preparation of which he was personally involved. The report, which will also be submitted to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights, makes concrete recommendations on the sources of conflict in Africa, ways to prevent and address them, and how to lay the foundations for durable peace and economic growth following their solution. Most of the issues dealt with in the report are those covered by the New Agenda and the Special Initiative.

53. As regards the role of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries in the implementation of the Special Initiative, it derives from its overall mandate, which is to mobilize the support and galvanize the efforts of the international community – in

particular the United Nations system – for the development of Africa and the least developed countries. More specifically, it provides support to the advocacy, coordinating and catalytic role of the Secretary-General for African development. In this connection, it has been given the task of following up the implementation of the Special Initiative and, in that capacity, it is a member, on behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, of the ACC Steering Committee for the Special Initiative. The Office is also responsible for reporting on and substantive support to the intergovernmental bodies in their deliberations on African development. As alluded to in paragraph 6 of the present report, the Office and the secretariat of the Special Initiative have enhanced their collaboration and exchange of information in the spirit of close cooperation and effective synergy of all United Nations entities, as called for by the Secretary-General.

54. With respect to the roles of UNDP and ECA, it should be noted that the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Secretary of ECA are co-chairs of the ACC Steering Committee for the Special Initiative. They are assisted in the discharge of this function by the secretariat of the Special Initiative. Issues relating to operational and coordination arrangements for the implementation of the Special Initiative, follow-up, monitoring and mobilization of resources are dealt with in the meetings of the ACC Steering Committee. Some issues are resolved in group meetings of lead and collaborative agencies on specific Special Initiative programmes. The Steering Committee reports to the ACC at its regular sessions on progress made and problems faced in the implementation of the Special Initiative.

55. With the establishment of the ACC Steering Committee on the Special Initiative in 1995, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on African Economic Recovery and Development, established under the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (1986-1990) and reactivated in programme 45 of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, has become progressively redundant. The chair of the Inter-Agency Task Force, the Executive Secretary of ECA, is now the co-chair of the Steering Committee of the Special Initiative. In addition, the System-wide Plan of Action on African Economic Recovery and Development, established in 1992 at the request of the Committee as the main area of activity of the Inter-Agency Task Force, has been replaced by the Special Initiative.

56. In the process of the implementation of the Special Initiative, notable measures have been taken to enhance coordination and harmonization of the activities of United Nations agencies. At the national level, the functions and role of the resident coordinators, as well as coordination and consultative mechanisms, have been strengthened. By building partnership around national priorities, strategies and programmes, sometimes through providing support and using the country strategy note as a framework, United Nations agencies are jointly promoting national ownership. The preparation of a common country assessment and the launching of the United Nations development assistance framework process on a pilot basis in 10 African countries are strengthening coordination and harmonization at the programme level.

57. At the global level, an enhanced collaborative approach within the cluster of education, health, governance and information technology for development have contributed to good progress in the implementation of those priority areas. The ACC Steering Committee continues to provide a mechanism for joint oversight of the implementation of the Special Initiative. The strengthened collaboration between the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries and the secretariat of the Special Initiative also facilitates the monitoring of the Special Initiative as an implementation arm of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No.16* (A/52/16), para. 354.

[2] Ibid, para. 356.

[3] Ibid., para 359.

[4] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No.16 (A/52/16)*, paras. 356 and 357.

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Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Coordination questions: progress report on the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001

Letter dated 27 April 1998 from the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women to the Chairperson of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

I have the honour to refer to item 5, entitled "Coordination questions", of the provisional agenda of the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-eighth session. Under this item, the Committee is expected to consider the progress report on the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001. It will be recalled that, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/34 of 25 July 1996, the Secretary-General was requested to submit to the Council in 1998, through the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, a progress report on the implementation of the plan. When the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 at its thirty-sixth session (E/1996/16), it had before it, in addition to the revised plan, the comments of the Commission on the Status of Women thereon (E/AC.51/1996/5). The Committee had agreed to conduct a progress review at some stage during the next four years, preferably in 1998, or in 2000 (A/51/16 (Part I), para. 168).

The Commission on the Status of Women, at its forty-second session, had before it the requested report on the mid-term review (E/CN.6/1998/3). Following its consideration of the report, the Commission recommended to the Economic and Social Council adoption of a draft resolution entitled "Mid-term review of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women 1996-2001, including the status of women in the Secretariat", as contained in the report of the Commission (E/1998/27).

In this draft resolution, the Council would, *inter alia*, endorse the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General. It would urge the Secretary-General to

* E/AC.51/1998/1.

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ensure that obstacles encountered in the implementation of the plan are dealt with effectively. The Council would stress the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the formulation and implementation of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, notably at the country level, as well as in the consideration of the triennial policy review of operational activities during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. The Council would welcome the work of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, and would request the United Nations Development Group to institute guidelines and procedures for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action through operational activities for development of the United Nations funds and programmes. The Council would also address the goal of 50/50 gender distribution by the year 2000.

I should be grateful if the contents of the draft resolution could be brought to the attention of the Committee for Programme and Coordination for its information.

(*Signed*) Patricia **Flor**